

**For Immediate Release:**

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## **Parole Board Directed to Adopt New Parole Hearing Policy and to Reschedule Over 375 Parole Hearings**

The Tennessee Attorney General has advised the Board of Probation and Parole to reschedule hearings for over 375 currently incarcerated offenders with parole hearings deferred by the Board for over six (6) years.

Tennessee Attorney General Paul Summers stated in a June 7, 2005 letter to the Board, "Inasmuch as our Court of Appeals has held that it is presumptively arbitrary for the Board to defer hearings for more than six (6) years, I strongly recommend that the Board formally adopt a policy prohibiting the deferral of future parole hearings for more than six (6) years." The Attorney General went on to state, "There are approximately four hundred (400) inmates presently incarcerated whose parole hearings have been deferred by the Board for over six (6) years. Failing to afford those inmates relief poses the potential for civil rights claims against the Board and its members."

The Board previously made plans to give each of the designated offenders a new parole hearing beginning in April, 2005. Those plans halted when it received Chancellor Claudia C. Bonnyman's January 18, 2005 order stating that the court does not have the authority to order a new parole hearing. The Board sought the opinion of the Attorney General and in his June 7, 2005 letter he indicated that Chancellor Bonnyman's order should not be a factor in the Board's decision.

Bo Irvin, Executive Director of the Board of Probation and Parole states, "We have received the recommendations of the Attorney General and will take immediate steps to implement his recommendations." The Board is developing plans to reschedule the approximately 375 hearings into the hearing dockets. Outside of these rescheduled hearings, Hearing Officials normally hold over 14,800 hearings a year.

According to Mr. Irvin, "These hearings the Board must now reschedule represent some of the most difficult cases the Board hears. Rescheduling of these hearings is asking a great deal of the victims, the victim's family, and all of the parties involved. But, with this ruling, we will work the hearings into the hearing docket as quickly as possible."

The Board of Probation and Parole is an independent State Commission governed by a seven member Board, all appointed by the Governor. The Board is charged with the responsibility for deciding which felony offenders will be granted parole and released from incarceration to community-based supervision. Along with the supervision of those granted parole, the Board is also responsible for supervising felony offenders who are placed on probation by Criminal Courts. The Board of Probation and Parole is responsible for the supervision of over 49,000 offenders in Tennessee.

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